

The Deliverance

INTRODUCTION

If you would, turn with me to Matthew chapter 8. This morning we are studying Matthew 8:28-34.

Matthew 8:28-34 (2016 ESV) — 28 And when He came to the other side, to the country of the Gadarenes, two demon-possessed men met Him, coming out of the tombs, so fierce that no one could pass that way. **29** And behold, they cried out, “What have you to do with us, O Son of God? Have you come here to torment us before the time?” **30** Now a herd of many pigs was feeding at some distance from them. **31** And the demons begged Him, saying, “If you cast us out, send us away into the herd of pigs.” **32** And He said to them, “Go.” So they came out and went into the pigs, and behold, the whole herd rushed down the steep bank into the sea and drowned in the waters. **33** The herdsmen fled, and going into the city they told everything, especially what had happened to the demon-possessed men. **34** And behold, all the city came out to meet Jesus, and when they saw Him, they begged Him to leave their region.

We’ve seen Jesus do some remarkable things already: He healed a leper, and the paralyzed servant of a Roman soldier, and Peter’s mother-in-law. We’ve seen that He cast out demons from many people, and healed them of the physical and mental results of demonic possession. We’ve seen Jesus exercise authority over human beings: a scribe and a casual disciple, both of whom wanted to follow Jesus on their own terms, which Jesus refused. And, we’ve seen Jesus facing a great storm on the Sea of Galilee, and dismiss it instantly, so that there was a great calm.

Today we see Him going into Gentile territory, and casting a legion of demons out of two men.

Now, there are four Gospels – Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Matthew, Mark, and Luke are called the “synoptic” Gospels, because they can be viewed together (that’s what synoptic means) in parallel form. They are not photocopies of one another; each writer told the stories in his own way. There are differences, but there are no contradictions.

As we study Matthew’s account today, I’ll be mentioning details from Mark’s Gospel from time to time to help increase our understanding of what took place that day.

JESUS ARRIVES WITH HIS DISCIPLES

Matthew 8:28 (2016 ESV) — 28 And when He came to the other side, to the country of the Gadarenes ...

The country of the Gadarenes is located on the eastern side of the Sea of Galilee, in the Roman province of Perea. The capitol of the province was the city of Gadara, which gave its name to the region. The specific area in which this episode takes place is also called the Gerasenes, for another large city close to Gadara, and the Gergesenes, for the small town of Gergesa, where all of this happened.

Confusing?

Norfolk is in the Great Plains; the Midwest; the upper Midwest; Nebraska; north-east Nebraska; the Elkhorn Valley; Madison County; and the Norfolk Micropolitan Statistical Area.

Likewise Creighton is in the Great Plains; the Midwest; the upper Midwest; Nebraska; north-east Nebraska; and Knox County.

If we met someone from Omaha, we would tell them we live in Norfolk/Creighton. If we met someone from New York, we would tell them northeast Nebraska. If we met someone from England, we might tell them we live in Nebraska, or in the Midwest, or perhaps the Great Plains.

DEMONS

Matthew 8:28 (2016 ESV) — 28 ... two demon-possessed men met Him, coming out of the tombs, so fierce that no one could pass that way.

What exactly are demons?

They are fallen angels who joined Lucifer in his rebellion against Yahweh. They do evil and cause havoc in creation. Like Satan, they have limited power; they are not equal to God in any way. They have already been defeated by the Lord Jesus by His death and resurrection (Colossians 2:15). We see in our passage that they had full knowledge of Jesus' identity, and knowledge of when final judgment would occur; at least, they knew that it was not yet time for judgment (Matthew 8:29).

The New Testament calls them *demons*, which is a Greek word that means deities; *evil spirits* (Luke 8:2), and sometimes simply *spirits* (Luke 10:20). They do possess power and seek to exercise authority, which is why Ephesians 6:12 calls them *rulers, authorities, cosmic powers, and spiritual forces of evil*. First Timothy 4:1 calls them *deceitful spirits* who invent *teachings of demons*. James 2:19 says they know exactly who God is, far better than we do, and yet they tremble before Him because there is no hope for them.

Satan tempted Eve in Genesis 3, and Jesus in Matthew 4. Both needed an external temptation, because they had no sin nature. With Adam's sin came a fallen nature, and we no longer need the devil or any demonic powers to tempt us to sin; our own desire is strong enough to lure and entice us (James 1:13-14).

What does it mean to be possessed by demons? It means to be under their control, suffering the effects of their presence.

Those possessed by demons in the Gospels had some unusual abilities:

Superhuman strength – Mark 5:5. Unnatural voices – Mark 5:7.

They faced various afflictions:

Aphasia, the inability to speak – Matthew 9:32. Deafness – Mark 9:25. Blindness – Matthew 12:22. Convulsions and seizures – Mark 1:26.

They also possessed unusual knowledge:

Full knowledge of Jesus' identity – Matthew 8:29. Knowledge of when judgment will occur – Matthew 8:29.

What I find interesting is that there are no direct connections between acts of sin and demonic possession. People are responsible for the acts of sin they commit. This is why the answer to sin is confession and repentance, not claiming to be a victim.

THE TWO DEMON-POSSESSED MEN

These men have been forced to live in the tombs, either by the demons which control them, or, more likely, because the people of Gergesa have forced them into isolation. They were so fiercely violent that they attacked any who passed that way. Mark 5 tells us that at least one of the men had been shackled and chained, but was so strong that he would wrench the chains apart and break the shackles to pieces. **No one had the strength to subdue him**, Mark writes, which means that people had tried and failed. This man was so mentally tortured by demons that he cried out and cut himself with sharp stones. Perhaps that was true of both men Matthew describes.

Matthew 8:29 (2016 ESV) — 29 And behold, they cried out, “What have You to do with us, O Son of God? Have You come here to torment us before the time?”

Notice three things here.

First, this is not the men speaking. They had no idea who Jesus was. Neither were they expecting judgment. But the demons in control of them knew these things, and spoke through these men.

Second, the demons recognized Jesus for who He is, the Son of God. The Son of God emptied Himself when He took on human flesh; that means that He made Himself a servant, and humbled Himself to the point of death on a cross. But He never ceased to be fully God. If Jesus had given up His deity, and was only a man during His earthly ministry, these demons would not have recognized Him.

And third, the demons knew that judgment is coming, and what's more, had a sense of WHEN judgment is coming. They knew that it was not yet time for judgment to fall: **Have You come to torment us before the time?** The answer is, no; Jesus had not come to torment them, but to free these two men from their power and control. As evil as demons are, and as much as they deserve the fulness of hell, Jesus never tormented or tortured them.

PASTORAL: If the Lord Jesus Christ spared demons from the torture that they so fully deserved, how much more will He show kindness even to the worst of sinful people? Judgment IS coming, we know. Satan and his demons, along with unsaved human beings, will be cast into the lake of fire, never to escape. But the time had not yet come during Jesus' earthly ministry, and it has not yet come today. Jesus did, and does today, what He commands us to do: He loved, and loves, His enemies. Because He is kind, He leads sinners to repentance. (Romans 2:4).

THE HERD OF PIGS

Matthew 8:30–32 (2016 ESV) — 30 Now a herd of many pigs was feeding at some distance from them. **31** And the demons begged Him, saying, “If you cast us out, send us away into the herd of pigs.” **32** And He said to them, “Go.” So they came out and went into the pigs, and behold, the whole herd rushed down the steep bank into the sea and drowned in the waters.

Why are the pigs in this story? Let's talk about angels a little more.

The Bible says that angels are spirits; specifically they are ministering spirits, who are sent to serve those who will inherit salvation (Hebrews 1:14). They have spiritual bodies – they are limited to being in one place at one time – but they don't have physical bodies. Demons are angels who have rebelled against God, and have been cast out of their rightful place into what could be called nothingness; a void; an abyss, a word which means bottomless or fathomless.

Demons certainly possess people in order to torment them, since only human beings are made the image of God, and Satan and his forces hate God and all that He has done. But perhaps demons also possess people in order to escape the emptiness to which they have been sent to await judgment, and to experience what we experience. Even though physical flesh is more fragile than pure spirit, it offers experiences that do not exist in the spiritual realm. For instance, the angels in heaven do not marry, which means they do not experience sexual relations (Matthew 22:30). They don't eat, they don't drink, they don't feel the warmth of summer or the cold of winter, they don't smell roses or see as we see.

The demons in these men knew that Jesus was going to cast them out of their human victims, and they beg Jesus to send them into a nearby herd of pigs. It would appear that the demons in these two men are so accustomed to being in a physical creature that they prefer even an animal to being confined to nothingness, as Luke 8:31 says, to suffer until judgment came.

The pigs were driven mad by the suddenly entrance of these evil spirits, and they rushed into the Sea and were drowned. Perhaps the demons knew that the pigs would destroy themselves, and saw it as an opportunity to go and possess other people. Or perhaps they did not anticipate that the pigs would destroy themselves. In Matthew 12 Jesus says that when a demon is cast out of person, **it passes through waterless places seeking rest.** Once Satan and his confederates were thrown out of heaven, they had no place to go. They cannot return to heaven, which they were created to occupy. If they cannot find a human victim, it seems that they must exist in a void, in utter deprivation.

THE HERDSMEN FLED

Matthew 8:33 (2016 ESV) — 33 The herdsmen fled, and going into the city they told everything, especially what had happened to the demon-possessed men.

The herdsmen observed what happened, but were not a party to it. They were far enough from the demon-possessed men to feel safe, but close enough to observe Jesus' interaction with them. They saw the men come fiercely raging out of the tombs, thundering toward Jesus. They heard the shouts and accusations prompted by the demons. Jesus said just one word – “Go!” Perhaps the herdsmen heard Him speak, or perhaps He gestured with His arm. Perhaps when the demons left the men, the men reacted in some way; perhaps they bowed down and worshiped, as others did when Jesus delivered them from demonic beings.

And then, suddenly, the pigs began to squeal in terror and agony, and rushed in a mass down the hillside into the Sea of Galilee, where they were drowned. The herdsmen had no control over them; it's hard enough to stop one pig from doing what it wants, much less a huge herd – Mark 5:13 says about 2,000 pigs drowned that day, a huge loss for their owners.

The herdsmen ran to the town of Gergesa and told everyone what had happened, especially what had happened to the demon-possessed men.

THE CRUELTY OF THE WICKED

Matthew 8:34 (2016 ESV) – 34 And behold, all the city came out to meet Jesus, and when they saw him, they begged him to leave their region.

The inhabitants of Gergesa came running out to the tombs to meet Jesus, and when they saw Him, they begged Him to leave the region. They knew exactly what He had done for these two men; He had freed them from demonic control. Mark and Luke say that when they arrived they saw the man – perhaps both men – sitting there at the feet of Jesus, clothed, in his right mind, and they were terribly afraid. Those who were there told them what happened to the men and the pigs. In that moment they had an opportunity to bring others to Jesus who were demon-possessed, or sick, or disabled. Instead, they were so terrified, and so hard-hearted, that they begged Jesus to leave. No one wanted Him to do anything more; they wanted Him gone. What about all the others who needed healing and deliverance? They didn't matter, only that Jesus had greatly disrupted their culture.

LET'S NOT LEAVE IT AT THAT

That's where Matthew ends the story, but we don't want to leave it there. As I said, Mark and Luke only speak about one of the men; perhaps only one of them responded with faith and gratitude. Luke writes,

Luke 8:38-39 (2016 ESV) — 38 The man from whom the demons had gone begged that he might be with Him, but Jesus sent him away, saying, **39** “Return to your home, and declare how much God has done for you.” And he went away, proclaiming throughout the whole city how much Jesus had done for him.

The man begged Jesus to take him with Him. What an irony!

Just a few hours earlier two men – **a scribe and a casual follower** – wanted to be with Jesus on their own terms; this man is willing to accept whatever Jesus asks and offers.

The demons begged Jesus not to send them into the abyss; this man had been set free from the power of the abyss, and was willing to submit to Jesus’ will.

The people of the city begged Jesus to leave because freeing this man had caused them a lot of money.

This man begs to follow Jesus because he owes Jesus everything, and has received his life back. His words and actions tell us that he had saving faith. He wasn’t just grateful for the help; his life was changed, not just because the demons were gone, but because Jesus was there.

Jesus refused him, not because his intentions were impure, not because he was unworthy, and not because he was self-centered, but because he had work to do. He needed to go back home, and tell everyone what God had done for him. Did he do that?

About a year later Jesus returned to the eastern side of the Sea of Galilee. Matthew writes,

Matthew 15:30-31 (2016 ESV) — 30 And great crowds came to Him, bringing with them the lame, the blind, the crippled, the mute, and many others, and they put them at His feet, and He healed them, **31** so that the crowd wondered, when they saw the mute speaking, the crippled healthy, the lame walking, and the blind seeing. And they glorified the God of Israel.

I think that this man took Jesus' instruction seriously. He told other what Jesus had done for him; when the Lord returned, He found the Gentiles of the area ready for Him.

Our hope is not in being set free from a bad habit, but in finding new life, eternal life, in Jesus Christ. Jesus lived a sinless life for this man. He gave His life as a sacrifice for this man. He rose from the dead in order to give this man eternal life. He didn't just free this man from Satan's power; He freed him from sin and death.

Jesus is still freeing people from sin and death, and the power of the devil. He freed me many years ago. He is freeing people every day. He does so by His grace, according to our faith in Him. There is no sin so great that He cannot forgive it; there is no life so old that He will not save. My hope and prayer is that you will turn to Jesus in faith, and repent of your sins, and receive eternal life, and be set free from the sin and death and the power of the devil.